

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 056966

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TO AMEMBASSY BONN IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 056966

BONN FOR HARTMAN OOB 3/14/75

FOLLOWING REPEAT LONDON 3812 ACTION SECSTATE INFO BONN BRUSSELS
COPENHAGEN DUBLIN THE HAGUE LUXEMBOURG PARIS ROME BELFAST BY
POUCH EDINBURGH BY POUCH LIVERPOOL BY POUCH DATED 12 MAR 75
QUOTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L LONDON 03812

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, UK, EEC

SUBJECT: EC MEMBERSHIP: PROGRESS TOWARD REFERENDUM

REF: LONDON 3116

1. SUMMARY: MARCH 11 WAS PIVOTAL DAY FOR BRITISH MEM-
BERSHIP IN EC. IN ADDITION TO SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION OF
RENEGOTIATION EFFORT AT DUBLIN EC SUMMIT (SEPTTEL), COM-
MONS DEBATED EC REFERENDUM WHITE PAPER (REFTTEL), WITH
GOVERNMENT CARRYING PROCEDURAL VOTE ON DEBATE BY MARGIN
OF 50 VOTES. WE UNDERSTAND WILSON WILL ANNOUNCE GOVERN-
MENT RECOMMENDATION ON RENEGOTIATED TERMS TO COMMONS
MARCH 19, FOLLOWING MARCH 17 MEETING WITH PARLIAMENTARY
LABOR PARTY (PLP) AND FULL CABINET DECISION BY MID-DAY
MARCH 19. AS A RESULT OF THESE DEVELOPMENTS, OUTLOOK
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PAGE 02 STATE 056966

FOR WILSON'S TIMETABLE HAS IMPROVED. END SUMMARY.

2. CONCURRENT WITH SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION OF EC RENEGOTIATION EXERCISE AT DUBLIN (SEPTEL), HOUSE OF COMMONS MARCH 11 DEBATED EC REFERENDUM WHITE PAPER WHICH WAS PUBLISHED FEBRUARY 26. LEADER OF HOUSE EDWARD SHORT OPENED DEBATE FOR GOVERNMENT, REVIEWING WHITE PAPER PROPOSALS AND STRESSING GOVERNMENT'S FLEXIBILITY ON ALL BUT SINGLE NATIONAL VOTE COUNT. GOVERNMENT POSITION ON THIS QUESTION, HOWEVER, APPEARS AMBIGUOUS (PERHAPS INTENTIONALLY), AS MINISTER OF STATE GERALD FOWLER LATER IN DEBATE SAID "GOVERNMENT'S MINDS ARE NOT CLOSED ON HOW COUNT SHOULD BE CONDUCTED".

3. HIGHLIGHT OF DEBATE CAME AS MARGARET THATCHER MADE HER FIRST MAJOR SPEECH IN COMMONS SINCE ASSUMING CONSERVATIVE PARTY LEADERSHIP. PRINCIPAL THRUST OF HER ARGUMENT WAS THAT REFERENDUM WAS A RISKY CONSTITUTIONAL PRECEDENT AND THAT LABOR PARTY HAD CYNICALLY ADOPTED THIS DEVICE TO AVOID INTERNAL PARTY SPLIT ON EC ISSUE. TORY BACKBENCHERS ROARED WITH DELIGHT. HER CONSTITUTIONAL ARGUMENT, HOWEVER, WAS DEVASTATED (TO GREAT AMUSEMENT OF LABOR BACKBENCHERS) WHEN FORMER LABOR FOREIGN SECRETARY MICHAEL STEWART POINTED OUT THAT AUTHOR OF HER PRINCIPAL CONSTITUTIONAL LAW REFERENCE HAD ALSO CONCLUDED THAT WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE WOULD BE UNCONSTITUTIONAL. CONCLUSION OF DEBATE WAS CLEAR VICTORY FOR GOVERNMENT. SCOTTISH NATIONALISTS, ULSTER UNIONISTS, SOME LIBERALS AND HANDFUL OF CONSERVATIVES (WHO IGNORED THREE LINE WHIP) JOINED LABOR TO DEFEAT TORY PROCEDURAL MOTION BY 50 VOTES. IN A RELATED DEVELOPMENT, MRS. THATCHER LATER ANNOUNCED APPOINTMENT OF DEPUTY LEADER WILLIAM WHITELOW TO TAKE OVER-ALL CHARGE OF TORY'S CAMPAIGN TO KEEP UK IN EC.

4. WE HAVE HEARD FROM VARIOUS GOVERNMENT SOURCES THAT WILSON WILL ANNOUNCE GOVERNMENT DECISION ON RENEGOTIATED TERMS TO COMMONS ON MARCH 19. PRELIMINARY TO ANNOUNCEMENT, GOVERNMENT WILL CALL SPECIAL MEETING OF PLP (MARCH 17) AND DISCUSS DETAILS FULLY IN CABINET, WITH FINAL CABINET DECISION OCCURRING BY MID-DAY MARCH 19. IT IS GENERALLY ACCEPTED THAT CABINET WILL ENDORSE AND COMMONS CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 STATE 056966

WILL APPROVE RENEGOTIATED TERMS BY OVERWHELMING MAJORITY, THOUGH PLP IS EXPECTED TO BE ALLOWED FREE VOTE. GOVERNMENT ALSO PLANS TO INTRODUCE REFERENDUM LEGISLATION BEFORE THE EASTER RECESS, WHICH BEGINS MARCH 27, WITH REFERENDUM ITSELF STILL SCHEDULED FOR THE SECOND HALF OF JUNE -- IN COMMONS YESTERDAY SHORT MENTIONED JUNE 19 OR 26, IF ELECTION IS TO FALL ON TRADITIONAL THURSDAY, OR JUNE 23 OR 30, IF GOVERNMENT OPTS FOR MONDAY.

4. COMMENT: SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION OF RENEGOTIATION REMOVES THE LARGEST OBSTACLE TO WILSON'S JUNE REFERENDUM TIMETABLE, AND YESTERDAY'S VOTE ON THE REFERENDUM WHITE PAPER INDICATES THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL NOT HAVE TO FACE A UNITED OPPOSITION WHEN THE LEGISLATION COMES TO A VOTE. PRESENT SIGNS ARE THAT THE GOVERNMENT WILL EVEN BE ABLE TO WITHSTAND SOME BACKBENCH DEFECTIONS IN THE EVENT IT

REFUSES TO BUDGE ON THE VOTE COUNT QUESTION. IN THIS REGARD, LABOR BACKBENCH SOURCES HAVE REPORTED THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS CONSIDERING THE POSSIBILITY OF TALLYING VOTES BY DEVELOPMENT REGION. THE MOST TROUBLESOME OBSTACLE TO THE REFERENDUM NOW APPEARS TO BE THE HOUSE OF LORDS. HOWEVER, LABOR BACKBENCHERS, BOTH PRO- AND ANTI-MARKETEERS, BELIEVE LORD GEORGE-BROWN WILL NOT LEAD A MAJOR EFFORT TO BLOCK THE REFERENDUM. IT IS ALSO DOUBTFUL WHETHER THE CONSERVATIVES WOULD HAZARD CONTINUED BRITISH MEMBERSHIP BY SPONSORING OR JOINING SUCH AN EFFORT.

5. COMMONS IS VIRTUALLY CERTAIN TO ENDORSE THE RENEGOTIATED TERMS OVERWHELMINGLY (ASSUMING A FAVORABLE GOVERNMENT RECOMMENDATION), AS MOST CONSERVATIVES WILL SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT ON THIS ISSUE. MANY OF THE UNCERTAINTIES SURROUNDING THE QUESTION OF CONTINUED BRITISH MEMBERSHIP, ACCORDINGLY, EITHER HAVE BEEN REMOVED OR APPEAR LESS TROUBLESOME AS A RESULT OF THESE DEVELOPMENTS. RECENT OPINION POLLS INDICATE THE BRITISH PUBLIC PREFERS CONTINUED EC MEMBERSHIP TO WITHDRAWAL, BUT ALSO REVEAL THAT THIS PREFERENCE IS NOT STRONGLY HELD (LONDON 3557). THE ANTI-MARKETEERS DO NOT APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN DISHEARTENED
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PAGE 04 STATE 056966

BY THESE FINDINGS.

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